

MINUTES

ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION OCTOBER 14, 2010

PRESIDING – Don Heath, Chairman

SECRETARY - Linda Casey, State Forester

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT – Don Heath, Jerry Smith, Melisa Love, Jett Freeman, Ken Real and Randy Gilmore.

ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION PERSONNEL PRESENT - Linda Casey, Tom Conway, Dan Lassetter, Craig Hill, Gary Cole, Jim Jeter, Dan Jackson and Regina Miller.

GUESTS – Sam Duvall.

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER – Chairman Don Heath called this special meeting of the Alabama Forestry Commission to order at 10:00 a.m. on October 14, 2010 in the Forestry Commission's State Office Executive Conference Room located at 513 Madison Avenue, Montgomery, Alabama 36104.

ROLL CALL – Regina Miller called roll. All Commissioners except Johnny McReynolds were present. Miller announced that a quorum was present.

Chairman Heath made a motion to excuse Johnny McReynolds who was absent due to a work conflict. Jett Freeman seconded the motion and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

Miller announced that the meeting had been properly advertised.

MINUTES OF THE JULY 22, 2010 MEETING – Randy Gilmore made a motion to approve the minutes of the July 22, 2010 meeting. Jett Freeman seconded the motion and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

LITTLE RIVER STATE FOREST (PARK) – Southwest Regional Forester, Gary Cole, reported that that a two-year memorandum of agreement had been signed between the Commission and Iron Men Outdoor Ministries, Inc. for the non-profit group to run the park area of Little River State Forest. He stated that an employee of the Commission will be assisting the group during a transition time. Ironmen has hired a husband and wife to manage the park and will be living in a mobile home on-site. Plans are still in progress to build two bath houses with funds obtained from an ADECA grant. Cole stated that there are commitments from volunteers to construct the facilities.

Commissioners commended all Commission personnel involved with the project.

CITY OF ATMORE WELL REQUEST – State Forester Casey related a request from the City of Atmore to purchase a well and surrounding property located at Hauss Nursery. Casey recommended that leasing, not selling the well site, was in the best interest of the Commission and the long-term goals for the property. She also recommended that the City of Atmore maintain the well and the surrounding property, pay all utilities, and provide the Commission with an unlimited supply of water. General Counsel, Tom Conway, suggested that a contingency be added that the lease be for a ten-year time frame. Melisa Love made a motion to approve the State Forester and General Counsel's recommendations and Randy Gilmore seconded the motion. The vote passed by unanimous vote.

HAUSS NURSERY PROPERTY – State Forester Casey stated that the Commission is in the process of evaluating if the agency can manage the 319 acres +/- at Hauss Nursery to produce income from

timber, cattle grazing leases, and/or sales of hay and pine straw or sell the property when economic conditions improve and land values have risen. The majority of this property is owned by the Commission fee simple. A small portion was donated to the Commission by Alger-Sullivan and there might be a problem obtaining clear title to this parcel of property.

Casey stated that a recommendation would be presented to Commissioners at the January, 2011 meeting for retention or disposal of the Hauss property.

ADDITIONAL MILLER NURSERY SITE – Tom Conway reported that no bids were received on a 41-acre parcel at the old Miller Nursery site during the sale process. An individual contacted the Commission shortly after the bid opening and expressed his interest in purchasing the property. This individual agreed to purchase the property at the appraised value of \$93,000. This transaction has been closed and the Commission has received payment.

OLD DALE COUNTY PROPERTY – The City of Ozark contacted the Commission and offered to purchase the old Dale County office site. The property was appraised at \$35,000 several years ago. The city offered to pay \$38,000 which the Commission accepted after verifying that property values had not changed significantly since the appraisal. This transaction has been closed and the Commission has received payment.

ORVIN TOWER SITE – The Commission owns this abandoned tower fire site in Mobile County. An individual has offered to remove the tower at no cost to the Commission. The site consists of 30 acres, of which, the Commission owns 20 acres fee simple. A reversionary clause is in effect for the remaining 10 acres. An adjoining property owner has expressed an interest in purchasing the 20 acres owned by the Commission. Prior to starting the process, the Commission will see if the property is likely to increase significantly in value in the near future if Commissioners authorize the sale.

Randy Gilmore made a motion to proceed with the removal of the tower and to authorize the sale of the 20 acres owned fee simple by the Commission. Ken Real seconded the motion and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

WALLACE TOWER SITE – The Commission owns this abandoned fire tower in Escambia County. The tower is located on 10 acres of property donated by Alger-Sullivan and has a reversionary clause. The Commission's title to this property is not clear. One individual and one corporation have expressed an interest in purchasing or leasing the property. They have been made aware of the title issue. The individual has stated that he is willing to purchase the property and accept a quit claim deed and defend his title himself if there is a claim against him. The property was appraised at \$24,000 in June, 2010.

Melisa Love made a motion authorizing the State Forester to sell this property for the appraised value of \$24,000. Randy Gilmore seconded the motion and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

BMP AUDIT REVIEW & PROGRAM CHANGE - BMP Coordinator, Jim Jeter, discussed a Best Management Practices (BMP) Review held August 18-19, 2010. He stated that the Commission was acknowledged for having an outstanding program which has made vast improvement during the past three years. For details of the review, see Attachment #1.

AFC BUDGETS FOR 2011 & 2012 – State Forester Casey reviewed the revenues and expenditures for the FY '10 & FY '11 Operating Budgets and potential impact to FY 2012. She reported that the ending cash balance for the fiscal year was \$4,911,545.

PERSONNEL UPDATE – State Forester Casey reviewed personnel changes for FY '09 & FY '10 stating that the Commission had a reduction of 70 employees in 2010. The reductions were the result of retirements, transfers, resignations, terminations and lay offs.

LONGE RANGE PLAN FOR HAUSS, MILLER, THORSBY & STAUFFER NURSERIES – State Forester Casey discussed Hauss Property earlier in the meeting and discussed other nursery properties as stated below:

MILLER NURSERY – There are 80 acres remaining at Miller Nursery that have not been sold. The Commission plans to sell most if not all of the remaining acreage this fiscal year. Research is underway to determine whether to retain and rebuild the shop at its current location or move the shop to the Communications Center property in Montgomery. A recommendation will be made to the Commission at the January meeting.

THORSBY & STAUFFER NURSERIES – The 180-acre Thorsby Seed Orchard is located in Chilton County. The Commission acquired this property with a reversionary clause from Auburn University in November, 1980 with the Commission paying Auburn University \$100,000 primarily for the buildings located on the property. Recently, the Auburn University Experiment Station has expressed an interest in obtaining the Thorsby property to conduct research.

The 221-acre Stauffer property is located in Lee County. The Commission owns 196 acres fee simple and leases 25 acres from Auburn University under a long-term lease agreement that ends in 20121. The Commission estimates that the 25 acres would be valued at approximately \$93,000.00. Additionally, the Commission has an office on the leased property that is now closed due to mold issues.

With the Stauffer lease expiring in 10 years, the Commission does not want to spend \$150,000 to repair the office and build a shop to house the equipment. The Commission has approached Auburn University with a proposal that would allow the Thorsby Seed Orchard to revert back to Auburn and, in turn, Auburn would deed, fee simple, the 25 leased acres located at Stauffer Nursery. The Commission paid \$100,000 for the buildings at Thorsby and estimated the value of the 25 leased acres at \$93,000. At this time, Auburn is not interested in deeding the 25 acres to the Commission but is willing to extend the lease. The Commission will attempt to continue discussions with Auburn.

East Central Regional Forester, Bruce Springer, is conducting an analysis on the income potential from Stauffer versus selling the property. Recommendations regarding both properties will be made at the January meeting of the Commission.

FOREST OPERATIONS DIVISION – Forest Operations Division Director, Dan Jackson, explained that the Management Division and the Protection Divisions have merged to form the new Forest Operations Division. Assistant Division Directors, Walter Cartwright, Neil Letson, and Stanley Anderson will assist Jackson in supervising all programs and services of the two former divisions. These areas include Stewardship, Cost-share, FIA, State Assessment, BMP's, GIS, Urban Forestry, Fire Operations, Dispatch, Communications, Forest Health, WUI, state lands, grants, and special projects.

Jett Freeman requested that each assistant division director report to Commissioners at meetings as have the regional foresters.

STATE FORESTER'S REPORT – State Forester, Linda Casey, reported that an Examiners of Public Accounts audit found two findings during the audit. The meeting dates posted on the Secretary of State's website for two meetings contained typographical errors which, according to the Open Meetings Act, meant that these meetings were held without proper notice to the public. Second, in the minutes of two meetings where executive sessions were called, the minutes did not state that a

motion to convene an executive session was made and recorded in the minutes and the votes of individual Commission members was not recorded. The time of entering the executive session, reason for doing so, and time of reconvening to the regular meeting were not stated.

Casey stated that a review of the Commission's Homeland Security Grant Program had been examined for the time period 2006-2009. All projects were current with no discrepancies. Training and exercises were scheduled and enforced. Financial Management records were well maintained with a backup system in place. The agency's program was rated as very good.

FY 2011 Competitive grant proposals to be submitted by the Commission to the USDA Forest Service include two single-state applications for Federal Excess Personal Property support for \$234,00 and Teaching Alabama's Youth the Importance of Sustainable Forests in the amount of \$350,000.

Multi-state partnership grant proposals include Forestry BMP Monitoring and Implementation in Impaired Watersheds, AL/OK partnership, \$553,000 - Alabama's request; Landowner Education: "Selling Your Timber," AL/FL/AR partnership, \$60,000 - Alabama's request; Developing Resources to Expand Traditional and Emerging Forest-Based Markets and Working Forests, AL/VI/GA partnership, \$200,00 - Alabama's request; Firewood Education & Outreach for SE U.S., all 13 state partnership, \$200,000 - Alabama's request; and Coastal Plain States Cogongrass Assessment and Suppression, FL/AL/MS/GA/SC partnership, \$200,000 - Alabama's request.

A grant proposal for Longleaf Restoration on State Forests to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in the amount of \$197,960 has been submitted and the Commission expects notification in early November.

A grant proposal to purchase raster graphic editor software to produce at-risk maps of urban development prone to storm damaged urban forests to the Alabama Emergency Management Agency in the amount of \$21,607 has been submitted and the Commission expects notification in the next few months.

State Assessment MOA - Goal #1 under statewide strategies of Alabama's State Assessment addresses the need for natural resource stakeholder groups to collectively address forest issues statewide. Assessment Team Leader, Neil Letson, has developed a memorandum of agreement where these groups commit to working together to achieve implementation results.

Casey reported that the Commission had taken/is developing strategies to address firefighting resource needs for the upcoming fire season. Strategies include revising the current two person policy from one that states that the second person does not need to be an Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) employee to one that requires that two AFC employees respond to fires. The rationale behind this decision is due to the safety of AFC employees, as well as volunteer fire departments or other individuals who might want to assist. Due to current weather and fire conditions, experienced and trained firefighters who have the appropriate PPE should be involved in initial attacks. The revision does not preclude a third person assisting the Commission, but not on initial attacks.

The Commission is in the process of developing a strategy using ARRA grant funds to purchase basic wildland fire training material and identifying several groups and individuals to present this training to VFD's. The Commission has trained more than 300 volunteer fire department firefighters but needs more resources to expand training to more volunteers. Allan Rice with the Alabama Fire College is willing to participate in a training effort.

The cost and effectiveness of hiring seasonal firefighters is being evaluated and will be discussed at the next Leadership Team meeting,

The Commission has two service agreements that have been or are in the development stage with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS.) One is a technical service agreement to provide EQUIP evaluations for landowners. Casey stated that Arthur Hitt had done an outstanding job working with NRCS and has increased the value from \$75,000 in 2008 to \$170,000 in 2010-2011. She stated that Hitt is working with NRCS to get several AFC foresters trained as technical service providers to develop 106 management plans for landowners. The AFC will be paid a sliding scale amount based on acres in the plan.

Casey told Commissioners that the agency is continuing ongoing outreach efforts to inform citizens of our programs and services. Talking points are being developed and Casey said that she will share them with Commissioners prior to the next meeting.

Ending her report, Casey praised Commission employees, saying they are involved in a lot of diverse activities, work all hours of the day and night, and don't receive the thanks and praise that they deserve.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE FOR NEW OFFICERS - Chairman Heath appointed Melisa Love and Jett Freeman to serve as the nominating committee for the election of new officers and to present their report at the January, 2011 meeting.

NEXT MEETING – Commissioners scheduled the next regular meeting for January 20, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. at the Commission's state office.

Ken Real made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:55 p.m. Melisa Love seconded the motion and the motion carried by unanimous vote.